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ABSTRACT

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI) began in 1998 in five cities (Chicago, Fort Worth, Hartford, New York, and Washington, D.C.) in 1998. The NJI targets high-poverty urban neighborhoods, attempting to connect residents to employment opportunities nearby and in the urban periphery by providing training, supporting interpersonal networks, and facilitating access to financial and other supports for work. While each site tailored its approach to local circumstances, all the sites shared the goal of bringing the level of adult employment among neighborhood residents to the level of the surrounding region over a period of several years. During the first phase, all the organizations worked to raise key issues and implement steps, such as defining the neighborhood boundaries, helping community-based organizations build work force development capacity, forging and maintaining partnerships with the public sector, forging and maintaining partnerships with other nonprofit service providers, focusing on employment, stabilizing staff, and designing and delivering effective technical assistance. Initial evaluation of the NJI provides these positive lessons: (1) providing sites with a clear goal helps them focus their plans and energies; (2) providing local, consistent technical assistance helps keep the project on track; and (3) even organizations with no previous experience in the employment field

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can develop effective jobs programs for their communities. (An appendix describes program implementation at each of the five sites.) (Contains 28 references.) (KC)

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NJI THE NEIGHBORHOOD JOBS INITIATIVE

An Early Report on the Vision and Challenges of Bringing an Employment Focus to a Community-Building Initiative

FRIEDA MOLINA
LAURA C. NELSON

May 2001

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OVERVIEW

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative: Assisting Inner-City Communities in Forming Resident-Targeted Employment Programs

Over the past two decades, poverty has become increasingly concentrated in America's inner-city communities. The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI) targets high-poverty urban neighborhoods, attempting to connect residents to employment opportunities nearby and in the urban periphery by providing training, supporting interpersonal networks, and facilitating access to financial and other supports for work. This first report examines the initiative in its planning and implementation phase.

NJI grew out of concerns shared by The Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Chase Manhattan Foundation, the Urban Institute, and MDRC to develop new approaches to improve the outlook for distressed and isolated urban communities. One of the primary goals was to explore the feasibility of substantially improving employment outcomes in one neighborhood by supporting the evolution of neighborhood-based employment projects that build on existing community organizations' capacities.

NJI began in 1998 in five cities: Chicago, Fort Worth, Hartford, New York, and Washington, DC. In each city, a community-based organization with strong ties to a neighborhood leads the design and implementation of the initiative. MDRC manages the activities across the sites, offers conceptual leadership for the initiative, and provides technical assistance. While each site was allowed to tailor its approach to local circumstances, all the sites shared the goal of bringing the level of adult employment among neighborhood residents to the level of the surrounding region over a period of several years. The tools for achieving this goal included: using "best practices" in employment and training services; collaborating with other private nonprofit organizations and with public agencies engaged in workforce development; involving neighborhood residents in activities to promote and support work; and encouraging access to financial and other incentives to support employment.

During the first phase of NJI — a period of planning and pilot implementation — all the sites worked to understand the initiative and to develop strategic plans aimed at dramatically increasing neighborhood employment. Community-based organizations with little prior experience in workforce development faced a steep learning curve. The process of finding local partners and establishing viable collaborations took time; it was not easy to focus resources and attention on the specified neighborhoods; and staff turnover was high. Despite the obstacles, NJI offers a number of positive lessons presented in this report:

- providing sites with a clear goal helps them focus their plans and energies;
- providing local, consistent technical assistance helps keep the project on track; and, perhaps most important,
- even organizations with no previous experience in the employment field can develop effective jobs programs for their communities.

Future reports will examine whether the interventions implemented in the second phase of NJI succeed in raising employment levels sufficiently to generate sustained improvements in the targeted neighborhoods.

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PREFACE

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI) is one of two community initiatives that MDRC is engaged in to help people in low-income urban neighborhoods access better opportunities in the labor market. NJI focuses on inner-city neighborhoods, while its companion project, Jobs-Plus, operates in public housing developments. Through our work on NJI and Jobs-Plus, we are striving to advance knowledge about ways to use social dynamics in low-income communities to improve individual opportunities and generate sustainable social change. Both projects grew out of conversations among MDRC, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regarding how to improve the circumstances of people living in poverty by working with their communities. The Chase Manhattan Bank was also a partner in developing NJI.

MDRC's work on NJI is applied and exploratory, providing oversight and conceptual leadership and bringing intensive technical assistance to the community-based organizations implementing NJI programs. This is also an opportunity for MDRC to work directly with community-based organizations as they design and establish new projects.

This report explores what MDRC has learned from the first phase of NJI, a period of intensive planning and pilot implementation. We hope that the lessons drawn from this work will be relevant to public and philanthropic funders of community initiatives as well as to community-serving organizations that are themselves interested in incorporating employment strategies into their activities. The authors have identified key issues in building workforce development services in distressed inner-city neighborhoods: the financial resources required, essential levels of public and community infrastructure, staffing considerations, and the need for discipline and focus.

With public policy increasingly focused on finding ways to aid the efforts of low-income working people, community-based initiatives may help establish a local social infrastructure to support these families. We hope that our efforts on NJI will not only benefit the neighborhoods participating in the initiative but will also lead to a clearer vision of how to design effective community-focused interventions.

Judith M. Gueron
President

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The Authors

INTRODUCTION

Through the Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI), selected inner-city communities that are currently characterized by high levels of unemployment are targeted with an intervention designed to substantially increase the percentage of adults who are working. NJI was developed to improve and focus the operation of employment and social service systems in neighborhoods while mobilizing community resources and resident capacities to build enriched environments that support work. In this way, NJI operates at the conjunction of workforce development and comprehensive community initiatives.

In 1996, in the context of impending "welfare reform," The Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Chase Manhattan Foundation, the Urban Institute, and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) posed the question "How can we best improve access to employment for the 8 million people who, living in pockets of entrenched poverty, remain isolated from mainstream work opportunities?" This group asked whether, by concentrating employment activities in specific neighborhoods, it would be possible to stimulate dramatic increases in local employment. Then, if significant gains could be achieved in employment outcomes, the group asked whether the community would experience broader improvements in the quality of life. At the core of NJI is the vision of employment as the driver for community change. Rather than trying directly to affect outcomes in multiple domains simultaneously, NJI uses the community as the frame of action for working across issues to realize outcomes in a single key domain: employment. The project's primary goal is to substantially raise employment among residents, to the point where working becomes the community norm for neighborhood adults. The designers intended sites to incorporate the following components: providing access to financial incentives to work, utilizing best practices in the employment and training field, developing community supports for work, and improving access to capital.

Starting in 1997, MDRC and its foundation and public founders led a site selection process designed to identify potential partner organizations that could take up NJI in their neighborhoods. We were looking for urban neighborhoods where poverty and unemployment were concentrated; for strong, dynamic, and experienced community-based organizations (CBOs) serving those neighborhoods; and for a promising local environment — a reasonably healthy regional economy and a public sector that would be open to an initiative such as this. Five sites were selected for inclusion in NJI:[1]

- **Washington, DC: Development Corporation of Columbia Heights (DCCH), est. 1984.** A community development corporation (CDC) with housing and real estate development experience as well as experience designing and running community service programs. Columbia Heights, an ethnically diverse neighborhood, is experiencing gentrification pressures.

1. For a short summary of each site, see the Appendix.

- **Hartford, CT: Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART), est. 1975.** A community advocacy organization. Frog Hollow, the NJI neighborhood, is home to a large number of Spanish speakers.

- **Fort Worth, TX: Near Northside Partners Council (NNPC), est. 1991.** A community service intermediary operating in a stable, homogenous community of Mexican immigrants.

- **Chicago, IL: Joint Opportunities Bring Success (Project JOBS), est. 1996.** An employment-focused collaborative of community-based service organizations in Chicago's diverse Uptown/ Edgewater neighborhood.

- **New York, NY: Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families, est. 1970.** A youth-focused community services organization. Employment was seen as part of a multifaceted strategy to revitalize a 24-block area that Rheedlen calls the Harlem Children's Zone.[2]

Three of the sites (DCCH, HART, and Rheedlen) joined NJI in early 1998; the other two were added in the fall of that year. Between 1998 and late 1999, all five sites engaged in extensive planning. The lead organizations hired NJI directors, and most sites began to form (or build on existing) collaborations with other nonprofit organizations serving the neighborhood. Two sites established their own employment and training centers. MDRC worked during this period to refine the NJI model and its core concepts, to provide technical assistance to help the sites develop effective strategic plans, and to make an assessment of whether the outlook for achieving the ambitious goals for increasing employment in the target neighborhoods was promising enough to warrant a commitment to implementation of the initiative at the sites.

In late 1999, NJI transitioned from a planning, piloting, and feasibility assessment phase to implementation at four of the original sites. Sites will receive funding for the first two years of implementation; most sites, however, have five-year strategic plans. Because this report draws on experiences during the first stage of NJI, it cannot generally provide hard-and-fast lessons but, rather, can point out critical challenges and promising approaches.

Here are some of the key issues and the questions they raise:

- **Defining the neighborhood.** Where are the boundaries? Whose "sense" of community matters? How do neighborhood boundaries affect organizational partnerships and resources?

- **Helping CBOs build workforce development capacity.** In a context where trust and connectedness matter in *reaching* and *effectively serving* the people who are hardest to employ in America's inner cities, CBOs often have the important personal relationships that public agencies or employment training services lack. What does it take to help these organizations lead an employment-focused initiative?

- **Forging and maintaining partnerships with the public sector.** NJI was conceived as a framework in which to mobilize the participation of major public sector workforce and

2. The implementation phase of NJI does not include the New York City site; see the Appendix.

employment systems — *not* as an initiative that would develop new workforce programs to run in parallel with existing structures. Yet, during the development phase of NJI, public policy with respect to workforce has been undergoing significant upheavals: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, Welfare-to-Work grants authorized under the Balanced Budget Amendment of 1997, and the 1999 revisions to the rules on usage of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds have all made significant changes in the public funding of and approach to workforce issues. During this tumultuous period, it has been difficult for NJI sites to engage public sector agencies effectively. In this context, what are the opportunities for CBOs to work with public agencies — and even to shape policy?

- **Forging and maintaining partnerships with other nonprofit service providers.** The lead CBO in each NJI site is also expected to form collaborative arrangements with other nonprofit organizations that work with residents of the neighborhood in order to ensure that residents have access to a broad range of essential services. Yet NJI collaborations have run into problems with such issues as differing priorities among the member organizations, inconsistent commitment, difficult negotiations centering on service quality and coordination, and how to attribute success. What strategies have worked so far to build promising neighborhood-focused employment collaborations?

- **Focusing on employment.** While all the sites embrace the basic NJI premise that a dramatic increase in employment levels will lead to broader community improvements, it has been difficult to get the sites to remain focused on the ambitious task of getting more people into jobs. Sites are instead tempted to address a range of other pressing community issues; indeed, most of the sites are already involved in other programs with other goals for the neighborhood. What does it take to secure focus on the principal goal? How can the sponsors of an initiative ensure that the CBO partners embrace the premises of the initiative and not participate merely in order to fund existing programs?

- **Stabilizing staff.** Staff turnover has been an ongoing problem in all the NJI sites. How much of this turnover is to be expected, and how much turnover appears to be related to the structure of NJI itself? Can we, as an intermediary and manager of the initiative, do anything to reduce staff turnover or respond more quickly and effectively when turnover occurs? By anticipating turnover, how can we build stability into each site?

- **Designing and delivering effective technical assistance.** While the initiative's designers anticipated the need to offer information on workforce systems, public policy, and best practices in the employment and training field, they did not foresee the extent to which lead CBOs and NJI collaboratives would need other kinds of technical assistance. What kinds of technical assistance have been essential during the planning and piloting period? What ways of delivering that

assistance have been most effective? What obstacles have impeded the absorption of technical assistance?

This report first discusses the basic premises and structure of NJI and then explores each of the above issues in greater depth. Some issues are specific to launching a place-based, employment-focused initiative, while others are common to community-building work. Both kinds of topics are addressed because even the generic issues are important in considering future endeavors to develop employment projects within a neighborhood context.

THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative (NJI) grew out of a concern shared by The Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Chase Manhattan Foundation, the Urban Institute, and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) — concern with the problems of unemployment-related poverty that continue to plague inner-city communities. Over the past two decades, poverty has become increasingly concentrated in America's inner cities, while many employment opportunities — especially entry-level jobs for people with limited education and skills — have relocated to the urban periphery. This has left inner-city residents more and more isolated from the personal networks and institutional connections that typically provide information and access to job opportunities. To address these issues, in 1996 the group conceived of a community-based employment initiative that would attempt to target high-poverty inner-city neighborhoods with sufficient employment opportunities and the supports needed to make those opportunities realistic and accessible in order to make a dramatic difference in the local culture of work.[3] One primary goal was to explore the process of supporting the evolution of a neighborhood-based employment project, building on existing community organizations' capacities.

Why Focus on Employment in Low-Income Communities?

High-poverty, inner-city neighborhoods often suffer from a broad range of serious social, economic, and environmental problems. Residents of these communities may themselves identify not only unemployment and underemployment but also crime and fear of victimization, physical deterioration of buildings and city infrastructure, low levels of education among adults and high dropout rates among youth, and a concentration of various untreated health concerns (including people with mental health and substance abuse problems) as both *results of* and *reasons for* the area's chronic poverty. Recognizing that these problems are often interconnected and that an effort to improve any one in isolation is likely to be undermined by the detrimental influences of the others, many members of the field have determined that a multifaceted approach is necessary. In fact, most of the comprehensive community initiatives launched in the 1980s and 1990s were designed to address this *spectrum* of problems, on the expectation that progress in several areas simultaneously would bolster advances in each one.

While accepting the interconnectedness of these problems, NJI's designers proposed as one key hypothesis that it is the low level of employment — what William Julius Wilson (1996) has called the "disappearance of work" — that is the central underlying cause of neighborhood deteriora-

3. NJI was conceived of as a companion to another initiative, formally known as the Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families. Like NJI, Jobs-Plus is an employment-focused, place-based initiative, but local public housing authorities rather than CBOs serve as the platforms for Jobs-Plus programs. Jobs-Plus targeted the residents of eight public housing developments in seven sites, and it employs an interrupted time-series, random assignment design for the purposes of impact research. More information on Jobs-Plus is available on MDRC's Web site (www.mdrc.org) or by contacting MDRC. See also Riccio, 2000; Kato and Riccio, forthcoming, 2001. NJI was designed, in part, to test whether the Jobs-Plus approach had broader potential beyond the context of public housing.

tion and resident disaffection. Not only do areas of concentrated unemployment have less in the way of financial resources circulating, but they also have weaker links to outside opportunities and, often, a more threatening social environment due to the numbers of adults without regular, structured responsibilities. NJI's designers reasoned that unless the initiative reconnected large numbers of adults to work, efforts to address other social ills would have little sustained effect. They also believed that a focus on employment as the driving force of change would help to ensure that the initiative's activities would avoid the common problem of diffusing energy and resources among a variety of projects, thus weakening the impact of efforts.

In Columbia Heights, DCCH is a Community Development Corporation, and part of what we're supposed to be about is economic development. From that perspective, workforce is an economic issue more than it's a social issue. In our area, if you don't have an income, you won't be able to stay here.... Work should be a big focus. People want to work.

— NJI Director, DCCH

Why Take the Neighborhood as the Frame of Action?

Employment programs typically take the individual as the service unit; individuals are recruited and receive a variety of services: job search assistance, training, coaching, child care vouchers, and so on. Job-seekers in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and unemployment face clear and specific obstacles related to their location and living environment that can undermine the effectiveness of individual-focused efforts. Problems related to place are said to include a lack of interpersonal networks to channel information about work opportunities, employers' prejudice against residents of particular neighborhoods, long distances between home and work opportunities along with inadequate transportation systems, few role models of employment, and personal safety issues that increase anxiety about, say, waiting for buses or leaving children unattended at home. Studies in Chicago of public housing residents who received Section 8 housing vouchers or certificates as part of the Gautreaux program, for example, showed that people who moved out of distressed communities were significantly more likely to find work than those who remained behind or than those who moved to communities similar to their original neighborhoods; moreover, the jobs they found were of better quality (see, for example, Rosenbaum and DeLuca, 2000). As an alternative to dispersing populations from their established neighborhoods, NJI seeks to address these location-specific obstacles to working in order to benefit a large number of individuals simultaneously.

An employment strategy approach has to be comprehensive to be successful. You need to consider transportation, affordable housing, quality of life issues in the neighborhood.

— Ann Pratt, Former Executive Director, HART

Looking at this issue from another perspective, the hypothesis is that concentrating large-scale employment gains in a place will, in turn, produce a spiral of related positive influences. Residents who work will serve as role models for others to pursue similar efforts and as sources of employment information (about job leads as well as workplace lore); higher incomes will result in higher investments in the community by residents and businesses; and higher employment levels and related prosperity will lead to changes in other community indicators, including health, education, and safety. Clearly, the goals for increasing employment in NJI neighborhoods are ambitious.

Finally, an implied but powerful underlying assumption drives NJI and other community initiatives: the power of social place, that is, the extent to which a community contains contextual factors and influences that can interact with the design and implementation of an initiative to strengthen (or lessen) outcomes. To harness the potential of communities as social places that can support work, NJI seeks to build on the often rich array of formal and informal networks, affinity groups, and mutually supportive relationships that define communities and tie them together. NJI explores whether it is possible to enhance such networks purposefully and to involve communities in the support of residents' pursuit of work. The initiative assumes that stronger, more work-directed networks, combined with a range of high-quality employment and support services, can lead to larger employment outcomes than can be achieved by just providing services alone. NJI will explore the extent to which it is possible to identify and to build on these networks in a manner that enhances communities as places that support work.

> *People develop communities and relationships where they live, ideally, so place is important for employment.*
>
> *— Ann Pratt, Former Executive Director, HART*

> *Society has become more isolated — people are not as willing to step out with our neighbors. In Columbia Heights, relationships aren't necessarily as strong or as productive as they could be, but there are a lot of people who know each other. Everyone knows someone else here. Kids know each other, and the more that's true, the more opportunities there are.*
>
> *— NJI collaborative member, Washington, DC*

The Implementation and Structure of NJI

NJI started with this basic framework — it would be an employment-focused, place-based initiative. By the fall of 1998, five neighborhoods had been selected for NJI, and, in each location, a community-based organization (CBO) was chosen to lead the initiative's local design and to pilot its implementation. The five CBOs selected were the Development Corporation of Columbia Heights (DCCH) in Washington, DC; Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART) in Hartford, CT; Near Northside Partners

Council in Fort Worth, TX; Project JOBS in Chicago, IL; and Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families in New York City.[4] Following site selection, the months from January 1998 through December 1999 were used as a feasibility assessment period. In this phase, MDRC was charged with refining the initiative's fundamental concept, with giving operational meaning to some of its basic ideas, and with exploring its feasibility through a period of planning and pilot implementation on the ground. Over the following year and a half, MDRC worked with the lead CBO at each site to help shape local strategic plans and engage in exploratory NJI activities. In January 2000, MDRC and its funding partners decided to go forward with a committed implementation phase in four of the five original sites.

Setting High Goals for Increased Adult Employment. NJI aims to transform the employment dynamics of inner-city neighborhoods, which cannot be accomplished through marginal changes. Therefore, NJI sets ambitious goals for the number of job placements and for the number of new workers sustained in the labor market. NJI sites endeavor to bring the neighborhood's level of adult labor force participation and employment up to the regional level over the lifetime of the initiative.

Working with CBOs. From the beginning, the team that conceived NJI believed that the desired scale of employment outcomes would require the mobilization of a variety of actors and resources. Good, trusting relationships with neighborhood residents would be critical in recruiting the often disaffected unemployed adult population who would need to be reached in order to make a noticeable impact on the employment rate in a community. For this reason, CBOs were selected as the lead agencies to design and implement local strategies for NJI. We looked for effective organizations with a history of successful program design and implementation and with strong connections to local residents. In prioritizing these qualities, it was recognized that the organizations were unlikely also to have experience with employment programs; in anticipating this trade-off, we weighed community connectedness against established program experience and concluded that it would be easier for CBOs to develop employment expertise than trust and connections with hard-to-reach residents. Nevertheless, we considered only organizations with at least a prior expressed interest in developing employment activities for their target populations. Given the intensive scale of services implied by NJI's saturation goals, we strongly encouraged the selected CBOs to form relationships and coordinate with other nonprofit service providers, as well as with the critical public agencies involved in employment and training.

Providing Work Opportunities. The first and most obvious objective of NJI is to ensure that community residents have the *opportunity* to work. This involves preparing residents for work opportunities, identifying jobs and helping link residents to openings, and supporting residents in their efforts to sustain work. We anticipated that an effective, comprehensive employment strategy would address such issues as employer linkages, transportation, child

4. Three sites (Hartford, New York City, and Washington, DC) joined the initiative in January 1998; the other two (Chicago and Fort Worth) joined in the fall of that year.

care, skill-building, basic education, pre-employment training, and career advancement. Each site would tailor its approach to the local labor market conditions, using a best-practices approach to employment and training.

Making Work Pay. For many neighborhood residents with few skills of value to employers and/or little work experience, the jobs open to them offer low pay and few or no benefits. Some public assistance recipients even find that the costs of *being employed* (transportation, child care, workplace clothing, tools, and so on) drain so much money that they are no better off receiving a paycheck than they were as dependents of the state. Residents of public housing or beneficiaries of Section 8 housing certificates or vouchers find that for every dollar increase in countable income (after exclusions and earnings disregards are subtracted), rent increases take 30 cents.[5] It was recognized that one key to NJI's success in increasing the number of working adults would be to make sure that work pays — by helping individuals to find (or work toward) better-paying jobs and by improving their access to existing supports and incentives for work, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the various supports for work that are available to public assistance recipients.

Developing Community Capacities to Support Work. The design of NJI assumes that the community itself is a key resource for information and support for employed individuals and for those looking for a job. Both formal institutions (churches, business associations, clubs) and informal groups and networks can be mobilized to help improve the flow of information about job openings and about work practices, to provide concrete assistance for working adults, and to reinforce a work-positive message and culture. Although the sites have had little time to focus attention on such supports during the first phase of NJI, community support for work is an element of the initiative that will become a focus during the implementation period.

Providing Access to Capital. In the neighborhoods where NJI is being launched, poverty is exacerbated by a lack of access to capital. Local businesses are starved for money, and residents who might launch a small enterprise or who might buy a home are thwarted by difficulties in getting financing. NJI's initial formulation included improving access to capital as a key element, in order to build stabilizing wealth in households and to encourage personal and commercial investment in the neighborhood. This element of the initiative has not been emphasized in most sites.

Designing for Synergies. The design of NJI tests two key assumptions about synergy and concentration of effort:

- Combining best practices in workforce development and social service delivery, while harnessing the power of place as a potentially rich supportive environment, will result in larger, more sustainable employment outcomes than could otherwise be realized if a program were built on only one or a few such elements.
- Concentrating large-scale employment gains in a place will, in turn, produce a spiral of related positive influences — residents who work

5. Note that changes in federal law will alter the rent rules in order to increase the incentive to work for residents of publicly subsidized housing.

serve as role models for others to pursue similar efforts and as sources of job information for others; higher incomes result in higher investments in the community by residents and others; and higher employment levels and related prosperity lead to changes in other community indicators.[6]

In other words, NJI's complex design aims toward generating dramatic and ultimately self-sustaining changes within a neighborhood context.

Funding NJI. During the design, pilot, and early implementation phase, all partners in NJI have benefited from the generous financial support of the initiative's founders: The Rockefeller Foundation, the Chase Manhattan Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); nevertheless, each site is expected to become self-sufficient by the end of the national initiative in 2002. Sites will accomplish this through two principal strategies. First, sites are encouraged to utilize existing services and resources — perhaps most importantly, public sector employment and training programs and supports — rather than attempting to create redundant programs. Sites are encouraged, when possible, to work with public and private nonprofit services to attract, redirect, and alter programs to fit the needs of the neighborhood. Sites are also expected to raise funds themselves for ongoing support of local NJI programs and administration. (Table 1 provides basic summary information on the NJI sites and lead CBOs.)

6. Although the hypothesis is that higher employment gains will lead to changes in other community indicators, it should be noted that NJI sites are encouraged to realize the changes by focusing on job-related activities, rather than seeing themselves as responsible for directly producing changes in other community indicators.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY INFORMATION ABOUT NJI SITES

	DCCH	HART	NNPC	Project JOBS	Rheedlen
Basic information					
City	Washington, DC	Hartford, CT	Fort Worth, TX	Chicago, IL	New York, NY
Neighborhood	Columbia Heights	Frog Hollow	Near Northside	Uptown/Edgewater	Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ)
Lead CBO: Name	Development Corporation of Columbia Heights	Hartford Areas Rally Together	Near Northside Partners Council	Project JOBS (Joint Opportunities Bring Success)	Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families
Lead CBO: Type	Community development corporation (CDC)	Community-based advocacy and organizing collaborative	Community-based development collaborative	Multi-agency employment development collaborative	Community service organization
Population and economic data					
Neighborhood population	17,157	15,646	16,000	15,268	10,167
Median household income ($)	16,378	16,523	19,926	11,472	12,858
Average household size	2.7	2.8	3.7	2.5	2.3
Households receiving public assistance (%)	17.6	33.6	7.2	28.0	30.1
Individuals in poverty (%)	34.7	39.9	28.2	47.1	40.9
Neighborhood workers age 16 or older	54.2	45.2	56.0	46.3	46.1
Regional workers age 16 or older (%)	71.5	64.6	67.4	61.5	55.9
Neighborhood unemployment rate (%)	9.9	14.4	10.0	13.0	16.1

SOURCE: Population and economic data are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990.

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MAJOR ISSUES DURING THE FEASIBILITY STAGE

Designing to Achieve the Goals

Early Issues. From the beginning, it was clear that the NJI sites faced several challenges in designing local programs. With planning and piloting activities now under way, the early experiences of the sites have provided MDRC and its partners with a greater understanding of the complexities of launching a neighborhood-focused employment initiative. For example, while NJI has some of the flavor of a comprehensive community initiative, the driving force of change for NJI neighborhoods — and the focus of activities — is employment. Maintaining that focus has proved to be a formidable challenge, as local partners are tempted to address multiple issues at once. Building workforce development capacity in a community-based organization with minimal prior experience in the workforce field has been another key issue. Other challenges include fostering effective partnerships both among community-based organizations (CBOs) and with existing public workforce systems; providing technical assistance that is clear, timely, and directed to the appropriate staff but that doesn't overload the partners; and balancing the neighborhood focus with other considerations. Some of these issues are common to complex initiatives; others are challenges more specific to NJI's employment and community focus.

While it may be too early to draw definitive lessons about what works and what doesn't, the NJI partnership is now more aware of the range of issues that the sites face in achieving the ambitious goals of the initiative. The following section outlines the ideas that were held about what would be needed to reach large-scale employment outcomes, and it presents some of the key observations — and challenges — that have emerged as sites commenced planning and implementing NJI.

Employment Saturation. NJI was first conceived as a companion project to Jobs-Plus, an employment-focused initiative targeting residents of public housing developments in seven sites. Jobs-Plus takes a service saturation approach; that is, to improve the effectiveness of the program, Jobs-Plus ensures that all potential participants are made aware of — and are encouraged to take advantage of — the services that are available to them. This is a formidable task for Jobs-Plus. In the much larger, neighborhood context of NJI sites, we quickly determined that it would be impossible to mobilize the resources needed to reach every adult resident. Rather than attempting to achieve service saturation at that scale, for NJI we shifted the focus to employment outcomes. The objective was defined as bringing community employment rates up to the regional norm, that is, to increase adult employment rates to the point at which the percentage of adults working in the NJI neighborhood is similar to the percentage of adults working in that neighborhood's surrounding region (generally, the Metropolitan Statistical Area, or MSA). This goal was termed "saturation-level" employment.

Each site is able to estimate the scale of effort needed to reach "saturation" employment by comparing current neighborhood levels of adult employment with those of the region, and then calculating the net number of new workers — nonworking adults placed *and sustained* in jobs — that would be required to raise the local employment level to the regional norm. (See Table 2.) NJI project managers use this calculation to help determine what activities, resources, partnerships and level of community involvement will be needed. For example, working backward from the number of new workers in *sustained* employment, NJI managers can estimate the number of new *placements* (taking job instability into consideration), the number of *participants* in job preparation programs (some of whom might drop out of program activities before landing a job), and the intensity of *recruitment* and outreach needed to achieve the goal of employment saturation.

For the purposes of a neighborhood-focused initiative, the employment saturation concept has several advantages over a service saturation approach; most important, perhaps, is that it shifts attention from service provision itself to working to achieve outcomes. Some aspects of employment saturation are left open to local definition, to allow each site to determine for itself the specifics of saturation, such as the time period and schedule for achieving saturation-level employment and the quality (in terms of wages, benefits, and the full-time, part-time, permanent, or temporary status) of jobs that "count" toward the goal.[7]

7. Note that the initial calculations use 1990 census data, which are clearly outdated, given the last decade's dramatic changes in the national economy and the labor market. In light of this, it was suggested that sites use these calculations as an indication of the scale of effort required, rather than as hard-and-fast targets. Census data are useful, however, because they provide a consistent measure across all sites and a consistent local comparison with the MSA. Moreover, since recent studies indicate that inner-city neighborhoods indeed have benefited in general from the drop in unemployment but still lag behind the rest of the nation (for example, TANF caseloads are increasingly concentrated in inner-city neighborhoods; see Rosenbaum and DeLuca, 2000), we believe that the difference between the employment rates in the MSAs and in the NJI target neighborhoods may not have changed dramatically in the intervening decade.

TABLE 2 NEIGHBORHOOD AND REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT DATA, BY SITE, 1990

	DCCH (Washington, DC)	HART (Hartford)	NNPC (Fort Worth)	Project JOBS (Chicago)	Riverdale (New York City)
Neighborhood					
Total population	17,157	15,646	16,000	15,268	10,167
Adults age 16 or older	13,312	10,662	10,844	11,655	7,660
Workers age 16 or older	7,210	4,820	6,071	5,393	3,535
Ratio: Workers to all adults (%)	**54.2**	**45.2**	**56.0**	**46.3**	**46.1**
Region					
Total population	3,923,574	767,899	3,685,415	6,069,974	3,546,846
Adults age 16 or older	3,097,846	609,726	2,932,069	4,694,066	6,792,315
Workers age 16 or older	2,214,350	393,995	1,976,606	2,888,784	3,798,814
Ratio: Workers to all adults (%)	**71.5**	**64.6**	**67.4**	**61.5**	**55.9**
Number of newly employed adults needed to bring the neighborhood ratio to the regional level	**2,906**	**2,070**	**1,338**	**1,780**	**749**

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990.

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MDRC found that although the numbers projected were intimidating to most of the sites initially, they also provided a concrete objective to plan toward. The numbers were galvanizing; they helped sites to think clearly about the scale of effort needed to achieve dramatic change in the neighborhood. More recently, however, MDRC has observed that projections of saturation-level employment can themselves distract the sites from the broader objectives of NJI (including, for example, community involvement) as the sites focus single-mindedly on job placement and retention. Moreover, as sites have gained experience in providing employment and training, we and they have considered *raising* the saturation targets for new, sustained workers. A degree of flexibility in the use of these targets is essential to their effectiveness as a planning tool.

Note that these early years of the initiative have occurred during an extraordinary time, when the economy has offered strong growth in employment opportunities in all the NJI regions. This has been an unusually prosperous period, and even many inner-city neighborhoods have benefited from the recent economic growth. The saturation targets are likely to be easier to achieve in a strong economy; in the event of an economic slowdown, however, sites not only will face a more difficult job placement challenge but also may find that increased number of residents have joined the ranks of job-seekers.

Defining the Target Area

Key Considerations. A number of considerations emerged in defining the geographic boundaries within which to focus NJI's activities. First, "neighborhood" is not a technical term — we encountered places called "neighborhoods" that had as many as 160,000 residents — and so the size of the neighborhood needed to be determined. Our approach to determining the scale of the neighborhood was rooted both in our interest in working with a coherent community and in our awareness that, in order to achieve changes that might be perceptible from the relatively weak effects of a small collaboration of CBOs, we should be realistic about the size of that community. Working with the Urban Institute, we asked the CBO partners to concentrate their efforts on neighborhoods with populations of between 10,000 and 15,000 residents. At that scale, the number of working-age adults in need of employment assistance was likely to be small enough so that the CBO and its partners might hope to serve, or otherwise affect, a large portion of this group. More specifically, while the NJI model does not call for *directly* serving each adult job-seeker (rather, over time, NJI expects that changes in the local culture and the structure of its employment opportunities will enable more adults to gain jobs without formal intervention), the total number of *new* adult workers needed to bring the neighborhood to "saturation-level" employment would probably be, in a community of this size, within the capacity of a good employment program.

In defining a neighborhood, we also considered the community organizing implications. By concentrating efforts in one locale, we expected that sites could mobilize support among residents and institutional actors. Thus, the neighborhood frame became a vehicle for organizing residents' participation. Because sites are attempting to rebuild or expand social networks among

residents to support employment, we sought neighborhoods of a size small enough that many residents might know one another, at least by sight.

For practical reasons, the availability of data also came into consideration in defining neighborhood boundaries. Because only the decennial census provides reliable, comprehensive, and easily comparable data on population characteristics disaggregated to small areas, and because many other data sources build on census data, we tried to match and confine geographic boundaries to census tract and block groups.

Although issues of feasibility, data collection, community organizing, and resident participation drove the defining of neighborhood boundaries, at times these concerns were at variance with one another. For instance, to determine whether to include specific blocks and streets within the targeted areas, we held detailed discussions with the lead CBO in each site regarding practical considerations (for examples, the presence of assisted housing units, contiguous boundaries with other neighborhood projects, the existence of major employers, and the presence of diverse ethnic groups). We found, however, that the target area according to these considerations often conflicted with residents' own sense of what constituted their "neighborhood." Residents generally define neighborhood boundaries based on their personal relationships or the locus of their primary daily activities (for example, where they shop, worship, or send their children to school). Moreover, residents may have different ideas about the extent, shape, and size of their neighborhood. Members of various cultural and ethnic communities may see the neighborhood as extending in different directions, for example, or as including different areas. Targeting an area that does not resonate with residents' sense of social cohesion is likely to have negative implications for the goal of building community support for work (a component of NJI that sites will implement in the upcoming year). Although we have sought to strike a balance among all these considerations, we have nevertheless encountered a number of challenges in working within the neighborhood frame.

Focusing on the Target Area: Too Large? Too Small? The participation of various institutional partners further complicates the neighborhood focus. Few public or private agencies focus exclusively on areas as small as the NJI neighborhoods. In fact, even the lead CBOs in several sites engage in activities beyond the boundaries of the NJI target community. Moreover, many public and private agencies define targeted populations not by area but in categorical terms: welfare recipients, at-risk youth, or homeless individuals, for example. For a project such as NJI, this means that the services offered by these agencies reach only fragments of the neighborhood population. In fact, this is one of the initiative's inherent challenges, but it is also part of the rationale for NJI itself. Another issue is that agencies may choose to serve a broader, more exclusive range of individuals (such as low-income adults); but if their target area is much larger than the area targeted for NJI (for example, the county), it can be difficult to persuade them to concentrate intensively on the NJI neighborhood — the agencies are likely to see this as diverting resources from other parts of their service range. The lack of congruence between neighborhood boundaries and targeted populations has implications for delivering

services to residents in the NJI-targeted neighborhood.

The sites' early experiences in implementing their employment strategies has revealed that the neighborhood framework presents two contradictory but related dilemmas: The neighborhoods are at once too large and too small. The neighborhoods feel *too large*, for instance, when sites face the challenge of marshalling sufficient resources to provide job placement assistance to *all* working-age adults in need of the services, supports, and opportunities that facilitate labor market entry. Because the funding associated with NJI is not intended (nor is it sufficient) to support the establishment of new service programs to meet the new demand generated by NJI, the sites are expected to build partnerships with appropriate service providers and thus gain their commitment to NJI residents. A number of the NJI sites have already established such partnerships. At this early stage, there are relatively few NJI participants at these sites; but when NJI is fully implemented, the demand it generates for services needed by new entrants into the labor market may challenge local capacity and partners' commitments. Looking ahead, although the saturation targets suggest reasonable numbers of new workers, the number of new participants in workforce programs that is implied by those targets could easily swamp existing service providers. What may now entail setting aside a few slots for NJI participants will likely increase to a need for dozens of slots in the near future.

This potential difficulty was illustrated during a funder visit to the NJI collaborative in Washington, DC. There, the NJI partners met with the property management staff of one subsidized housing development that has 407 units and over 400 individuals who will need employment services. The service providers in the collaborative (generally, agencies of modest size) indicated that while they may be able to assist a portion of these residents at current staff and resource levels, they would find it difficult to adequately assist all 400 residents — and this is only one building in the targeted neighborhood.

On the other hand, the neighborhoods may also seem *too small* to attract sufficient attention and resources. Public funding sources often mandate service to a larger number and to a more dispersed clientele. Since funding streams are generally categorical, service providers tend to target individuals who have specific characteristics regardless of where they reside, and they generally hope to serve large numbers to ensure their income stream. It can be difficult to secure commitments from such service providers to serve residents in one small geographic area — doing so runs counter to service providers' usual orientation and modes of operation. The solution to this problem will likely entail finding overlap between the service areas of providers and the targeted neighborhood, thereby ensuring that NJI residents can avail themselves of the range of services, without having to ask the partners to restrict their services to NJI residents. Another tactic would be to demonstrate the effectiveness of NJI recruitment in helping to channel participants into good programs; programs that are searching for participants may find NJI an attractive source of people.

Local founders, too, often view resource allocation and employment as a regional zero-sum game, and they may be hesitant to commit resources on a significant scale to any particular neighborhood.

Indeed, even when founders embrace the idea that a geographically targeted effort will benefit from synergies, they are likely also to voice the need to distribute resources more widely and avoid the perception that they are concentrating on one neighborhood to the exclusion of others. Such political considerations require delicate and frank conversations among NJI partners and interested potential founders.

Even the lead CBO in an NJI site may have difficulty focusing on the target neighborhood. The community agencies that were selected for NJI are all engaged in multiple initiatives and collaborations, each of which has different target areas and populations; in fact, this very dynamism is what, in part, led to their selection for NJI. Even though these CBOs recognize the value of neighborhood targeting, their other efforts have a tendency to divert attention and resources from NJI. (This varies from site to site, often reflecting the relative scale of NJI compared with other ongoing programs.) And, as is true of their partner organizations, in cases where the lead CBO is involved in a neighborhood larger than that defined for NJI, that community agency too may find it difficult or politically uncomfortable to devote resources to a subset of the larger service area. In response, much of our technical support has been aimed at helping lead CBO partners to navigate these sometimes competing demands in ways that mobilize sufficient resources to underwrite specifically NJI-related activities. On occasion we have even had to remind the lead CBO that NJI is a priority initiative.

Finally, at this early stage of NJI, the scale of activity is small enough that the "neighborhood focus" is barely perceptible. In most sites, relatively few individuals have been served so far — NJI is more neighborhood-*based* than neighborhood-*focused*. The issues of neighborhood focus and definition will become more significant as sites expand their range of activities and gain visibility in their communities.

> *The neighborhood frame restricts the true impact of what we are doing. The only problem with targeting such a small area is that there could be impacts on other areas in Uptown that could be overlooked or missed. For instance, Project JOBS — before NJI — was established to serve the organizations' members in Uptown and the surrounding communities of Edgewater and Rogers Park. We think that Project JOBS will have just as much of an impact . . . outside the target area as it will in the target area. If all our work could be counted toward NJI, then we could show a significant, broader impact.*
>
> — *Sheila Perkins, NJI Director, Project JOBS*

Forging and Maintaining Partnerships

In program terms, NJI was intended to work by improving neighborhood access to existing workforce development services, by ensuring that those services met the needs of job-seeking adults, and, where possible, by changing the local dynamics of opportunities to better fit the characteristics of neighborhood residents. We did not envision the development of new employment centers and new systems that would run in parallel with existing services. Rather,

through strategic partnerships, brokering, and advocacy, we expected that the lead CBO would put together a package of services and opportunities targeted toward neighborhood residents.

There were two reasons for taking this approach. First, we anticipated that many of the job-seekers would face multiple barriers to employment and, therefore, would need a variety of types of assistance. Such needs could best be met by ensuring access to a range of service providers experienced in several areas (rather than having one organization attempt to gain expertise across the board). Second, MDRC and its funding partners assumed that even the most capable community organization would be unable on its own to achieve the high levels of increased and sustained employment expected from NJI. Rather, such a scale of effort would require the active participation of multiple actors and institutions (including, for example, public agencies, nonprofit service providers, affinity groups, civic leaders, residents themselves, and others) — all contributing their resources for the benefit of neighborhood residents. Without the participation of key institutional partners, a lead CBO would be highly unlikely to obtain and sustain the level of resources and effort required to serve the neighborhood's working-age adult population.

Working with the Public Sector. In particular, we expected CBOs to make connections with existing public systems, which are generally the most powerful entities in the workforce development environment. Public systems, especially in the era of welfare reform, have significant resources to focus on harder-to-employ populations, and we realized that sites would be unlikely to reach the NJI goals without public sector support. The initiative sought to attract and redirect some of these existing public resources to benefit the target neighborhood. Local sites were expected to work to connect with existing public employment programs and to leverage the public resources available through welfare departments and workforce boards to prepare disadvantaged neighborhood residents for work and connect them with the local labor market. In so framing NJI, the goal was to avoid duplication of effort by ensuring that NJI partners would make use of public resources in a manner that complemented and improved or built on the neighborhood's employment, placement, and social service delivery infrastructure.

As a first step in gaining public support for NJI, the project team sought to educate and enhance the lead CBOs' understanding of their states' welfare reform policies, the policies and practices of private industry councils and workforce development boards, and other policies that impinge on or might support the job initiative. We believed that building the capacity of the lead agencies to understand and influence policies affecting their neighborhoods would enable them to mobilize public sector support — in terms of policy, monetary considerations, and service delivery — for NJI and for the employment-related services that residents of their neighborhoods need. We supplied NJI directors with printed information (monographs, papers, summary tables, and other documents) explaining federal and local policies; organized briefings on the Workforce Investment Act, TANF and its 1999 revisions, and the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work grants; and helped sites develop strategies for contacting with local, regional, and federal agencies.

The hardest thing is proving we're not an inexperienced CBO, but a community organization that shows substance and follow-through on all projects and programs. The public agencies understand we represent the voice of the community, through service providers and residents; however, we want to make sure they don't treat us as an incompetent organization that has no real understanding of what we do.

— Sheila Perkins, NJI Director, Project JOBS

Although it is too soon to draw conclusions about the success of NJI sites in the public policy domain, their early experiences illustrate the range of challenges and issues that nonprofit and public agencies face in collaborating on employment-related issues. For instance, although the Hartford site successfully landed a local welfare-to-work contract, it found that winning the contract was easier than negotiating the terms of the agreement that would allow the site to match the services to the needs of neighborhood residents. In describing the difficulty in gaining agreement on the contract, a local leader recited a familiar refrain: Instead of using new state welfare-to-work policies and procedures as guidelines for what is *possible*, public agency staff tended to interpret the new policies just as restrictively and rigidly as they had interpreted the former welfare policies. Nonetheless, these negotiations proved to be a useful introduction to the formal workforce development system, and the experience gave the lead CBO an appreciation both for how the system works — or doesn't work — and for the need to work with the public agency to formulate policies and programs, first by helping that agency to understand the needs of the targeted population and then by using this information to translate legislation into programs that can ease entry into the labor market. Making the public systems work better for the residents of the neighborhood is now an important aspect of this site's NJI strategy.

In the same site, the lead CBO and its service provider partners ran into the familiar problem of slow reimbursements from public sources for the services they had delivered. Several of the participating CBOs are small, fragile organizations that operate on limited budgets, and not being paid in a timely manner can create serious cash flow problems. Once again, however, adversity has been the mother of public policy invention: The NJI collaborative has focused on helping public agency staff to understand the circumstances of nonprofit agencies and to streamline reimbursement procedures accordingly. Notably, as a result of this experience, the lead CBO was invited by the chairman of the Employment and Training Commission — as one of two community representatives — to participate on the panel responsible for preparing the state's five-year plan under the Workforce Investment Act.

Similarly, the sites and the NJI team have also developed a stronger appreciation for the constraints on public agency employees — even those who try to be responsive to neighborhood needs. Public employees labor in fluid environments where both the welfare and the workforce systems are undergoing tumultuous change, and they find themselves confronted, in the case of two NJI sites, by CBOs that are effective advocacy organizations

(these are community organizing agencies that have recently developed an interest in employment-related issues). This can complicate the dynamics of forging partnerships between the CBO and public agencies. In this context, some public officials may view newfound interest in workforce issues as a threat, and they may perceive offers to work cooperatively as a challenge to their authority. They may see interest in workforce policy simply as a self-serving attempt by one group of CBOs to gain preferential access to funding; and CBOs that have advocacy experience may respond to public sector hesitation, obstacles, or wavering in their accustomed adversarial style. In the process, the search for cooperative relationships between public and private nonprofit agencies and employer groups can, at least initially, take on the more traditional, antagonistic characteristics of relationships between community advocates and public agencies. Whether this more conflictual approach will translate into gains for the targeted neighborhood is yet to be seen, but alternating the carrot and the stick has thus far proved quite successful in one NJI site in gaining significant public support and cooperation for its jobs initiative.

Some of the NJI sites have reacted in another way to unresponsive public institutions or to welfare and workforce systems that they see as not particularly sensitive to the needs of the most disadvantaged jobseekers: They have established alternative, tailored employment programs. Indeed, some NJI sites have been hesitant to receive public funding, preferring the more flexible funding available through private sources — support that is less categorical and otherwise unencumbered and, therefore, can be used more easily to develop new employment strategies. Still other sites have postponed forming relationships with the public sector, simply because they have yet to define a role for time-strapped public officials who have limited tolerance for what are often amorphous and searching initial collaborative meetings. MDRC has stressed to the sites the critical importance of engaging public institutions both as a source of funding to sustain their efforts over time and in pursuit of policies that facilitate skills acquisition and labor market entry. At the same time, we acknowledge that the NJI site that has been most aggressive in engaging public agencies (at times this site has taken a confrontational stance vis-á-vis the public sector) appears to be on a trajectory to realize large outcomes compared with the other sites. At this point, no one can predict whether that particular site will experience any negative repercussions from its initial adversarial relationship with the public sector or whether the more cooperative approach of the other sites will eventually pay off by attracting public resources and increasing employment.

Working with Other Nonprofit Organizations. Sites face additional challenges in their efforts to build institutional partnerships with other private, nonprofit agencies. It may be difficult to "sell" participation in NJI to other organizations. Potential partners face pressures to deliver on their own projects and mandates. The lead CBO must identify the overlap between the opportunities NJI offers and the interests of other service providers (for example, to serve clients more effectively, to gain access to additional resources, to participate in staff training, to help revitalize the neighborhood). It is important, however, to realistically portray to potential partners

what the commitments are in terms of time, staff, and other resources and what kinds of cooperative agreements might be needed to participate in NJI.

> *Our organization has been involved in some failed attempts at collaboration before. This [NJI] is the longest-lasting one so far. As a collaborative member, what makes it difficult was that there was a long ramp-up period — a year or more — and it was hard to stay motivated and interested. Resources are another problem: All of us are thinly staffed, and it's hard to attend meetings regularly without compensation. But one of the clear benefits, as the collaboration has gotten going, is that we can surrender a part of what we used to do — job readiness training — to the [NJI] job club, and then each organization can specialize more in what we do best.*
>
> *— NJI collaborative member, Washington, DC*

At the same time, one of the key challenges is the need to determine a good mix and number of partners. Given the complicated variety of issues that neighborhood residents face, sites have an interest in brokering access to a range of high-quality services. Yet the more partners, the more complicated collaboration becomes. In addition to the obvious problem of scheduling meetings, finding space, and reaching decisions among a large number of institutions, each partner brings with it its own set of interests, and these may tend to push for expansion of the scope of activities. For example, the addition of an ethnic association may surface the need to address immigration issues facing their population, or an agency that targets homeless individuals might join and voice an interest in increasing the availability of emergency shelters. These needs are clearly legitimate, but if securing the commitment of new partners diverts attention from the primary goal of NJI — employment — this is likely to be a net loss for the initiative. In other words, the local NJI leadership must balance the need to be able to refer residents to a variety of services with the complications of having many organizations as official partners. In consideration of these pressures, one site chose to build its collaborative with as few partners as possible *in* the collaborative but to contract with other providers to deliver services to the targeted area.

Generally, the lead CBO in each site has been successful in engaging other nonprofit agencies toward the NJI effort. Obtaining consistent participation in the collaborative, however, is a struggle at all the sites. As is true of many collaborative relationships, even the most willing institutional participants are finding that NJI requires a commitment of staff time and resources that can be difficult to sustain over time. Collaborative partners clamor for funding and resources to support their participation and attendance at meetings. A number of NJI sites have begun to fundraise on behalf of the collaborative in order to bring in additional support to underwrite program operations of collaborative partners. While this does not generally solve the problem of supporting partners' staff time for participation in collaborative meetings — attendance is still an additional task for already stressed staff members — it has helped partners to view participation as a potential avenue for increased support for

service delivery. In Washington, DC, where local fund-raising prospects are limited, the lead CBO has shared its NJI dollars with collaborative members to that they could hire staff to assist Columbia Heights residents in finding employment, thereby demonstrating the CBO's appreciation of and commitment to its partner agencies. Collaborative partners are delighted to have additional staff to help with job development and other program operations — staff they could not support, on their own.

The issue of commitment is exacerbated by the structure of the initiative itself: NJI's "payoff" — the potential transformation of the community through employment saturation — lies far in the future. Similarly, at several of the sites, partner organizations got involved early but found that the long planning phase of the initiative drained their enthusiasm. It became clear that some specific activities with intermediate results for the participating organizations and for their clients were important in maintaining partners' commitment to the initiative.

> *Until the job club started, there was no NJI. We saw the potential, there was a lot of excitement, but then it was just spinning wheels. It was continually "being planned." I stopped going to the collaborative meetings because nothing was going on. But then when the job club was gearing up to begin, I joined in and fully supported it because jobs are a key issue in Columbia Heights right now.*
>
> *— NJI collaborative member, Washington, DC*

Once the collaborative is established, managing it presents a new set of challenges for each lead CBO. The tasks of coordinating services and enforcing quality standards across the collaborative are critical. Different partners bring various operating styles, organizational cultures, service delivery philosophies, and staffing capacity — all of which have implications for the delivery of services to neighborhood residents. Because partners operate independently and their participation is driven in some measure by their own organizational self-interests, the lead CBO enters dangerous territory when raising issues of program flow and service coordination, referrals, performance, and accountability. For example, at one site, when residents in a focus group suggested that the existing services were inadequate, providers became defensive and blamed the residents for their lack of participation rather than listening to residents' opinions about why they had problems accessing services. The lead CBOs lack leverage over partnering service providers; nonetheless, the success of NJI is predicated, in part, on residents' having access to and receiving high-quality employment assistance. In many cases, the collaborative partners clearly share the goals of NJI; however, without the lure of financial support (which the lead CBO receives but they do not), they may have little enthusiasm for adapting their programs (services, hours, locations, reporting forms, and so on) to improve NJI's overall operation. From the outset, the challenge is to design a process that builds service provider ownership in the initiative. Without an inclusive process, lead CBOs can offer little initially to encourage real

coordination and collaboration among service provider partners.

Sites have responded to these challenges in a variety of ways, although the true test of service providers' performance will not be evident until the volume of clients in search of employment services increases over the next few years. As a way to avoid potential performance problems, the Fort Worth site mapped and assessed the neighborhood service provider infrastructure before inviting organizations to participate in NJI. The lead CBO, the Near Northside Partners Council (NNPC), had discussions with various actors (including public agencies, employers, and residents) to learn more about local agencies' services and the quality of delivery, and then it selected organizations that would make good, dependable partners. Chicago's lead CBO, Project JOBS, is attempting to address issues of local providers' accountability and service quality by writing contracts that specify outcome measures. In Washington, DC, the Development Corporation of Columbia Heights (DCCH) tackled this issue in a more *collaborative* manner: This lead CBO made sure to keep its partners involved throughout the planning and start-up phase. Collaborating organizations were treated as equal partners during the design phase of the proposed NJI job club, and so the partners began to identify with and have a stake in the success of the job center. To further engage its partners, DCCH has made sure that partners attend technical assistance sessions offered by MDRC and its site consultants (site "reps"), as a way to expose staff to best practices; this has also helped local partners build capacity. In fact, collaborative partners at this site (and others) now attend NJI cross-site events and meetings. Feeling confident in the collaborative, the partner agencies at this site have recently signed memoranda of understanding that spell out their individual roles, responsibilities, and performance measures. Moreover, DCCH has passed through some of its NJI funds to key partners so that they can hire more staff to deliver additional services to neighborhood residents.

> *Our CBO partners know they need a way to get more neighborhood residents to use their services. There is pressure from our founders to find a way to get services to the underserved populations. We can help market the services they provide. That is how we can assist them. We know how to do the outreach in our neighborhood.*
>
> *— Abby Gamboa, Executive Director, NNPC*

Early experience, however, suggests that some service providers view the lead CBO with suspicion or jealousy, questioning why it was selected to lead the collaborative effort. To alleviate such tension, sites have tried distributing lead responsibilities and work tasks among partners — rotating the lead for fund-raising among local partners, sharing the chair of collaborative meetings with different agency staff, welcoming partners' input and participation in the hiring of NJI staff, sharing technical assistance resources by inviting partners to conferences and meetings with NJI founders, and so on. More recently, as noted above, Chicago and Washington, DC,

have taken the approach of sharing their NJI funds with their partners; this gesture, together with the inclusive culture fostered by the lead CBO, has gone a long way toward easing early tensions and suspicions.

Much of the sites' experience to this point has been in the formation stage of partnering. As NJI matures, sites are sure to encounter new challenges in maintaining and managing collaboration with service providers.

Coping with Staff Turnover

When local CBO partners were initially selected, we looked for organizations with strong leaders and assumed that the executive director of each lead CBO would be able to devote considerable time to steward the local design and pilot implementation of NJI. In retrospect, it seems obvious that the executive directors of these organizations had full workloads and that we should have anticipated that they would not be able to focus on this single initiative. Instead, at each site, the initiative's leadership has been delegated to an NJI director, who is usually someone newly hired to assume this responsibility.

It has not been easy to hire and retain local NJI directors, and none of the sites now has its original director in place.[8] One site has had three directors; the others have also struggled with turnover and awkward interim arrangements. Turnover in this position poses significant problems for a local site. Relationships with partner agencies and with the public sector are sensitive, and turnover in local leadership has, at times, resulted in loss of momentum at least, and even in loss of confidence in the project. Moreover, MDRC invests in building the capacity of each director; the departure of one has real costs because knowledge is drained from the initiative. New directors are challenged not only by the need to understand the principles of NJI and travel the learning curve for workforce issues but also by having to rebuild relationships that have attenuated or even broken trust.

Finding individuals with the right background, knowledge, and experience to fill the position of NJI director has been a challenge. Several sites have decided not to make the director's position a senior hire. In at least one site, staffing and pay structures made it difficult to hire a director with sufficient experience and seniority to lead NJI, because the lead CBO felt this would lead to internal discord. In other cases, competing programs have made it difficult to place a high priority on a senior hire for NJI. In a few sites, the CBO hired (or delegated responsibility to) junior staff, who became frustrated in their job in part because they lacked the experience and/or authority to move the project forward. The fact that NJI is often a very different kind of project from what long-time employees of the lead CBO are accustomed to can exacerbate tensions in the organization, particularly if the NJI director does not hold a senior position.

Some of the choices of director seemed promising but turned out to be problematic for reasons that might have been anticipated. A few of the brief-tenure directors were hired because they had experience working in the public sector on work-

8. In January 2000, four of the original five sites moved from the program feasibility phase into the implementation phase.

force issues. These individuals proved to be unsuited to the demands of working in a dynamic, flexible, community-based organization that was designing a local initiative from scratch. An opposite problem was that some sites initially chose to hire a director with little or no experience in community-building or workforce development. It would be highly unlikely, of course, to find a candidate with experience in workforce, organizational development, and community-building. So each site needed to consider which of these elements was the director's primary responsibility.

Perhaps more to the point, the skills, experience, and personality that are needed in designing a program are very different from those needed to implement and manage that program. From this perspective, some degree of turnover at the level of NJI director may be inevitable as the sites transition from planning to operating activities. (In fact, it may be useful to anticipate such turnover when launching similar initiatives.) However, despite slow progress as a result of changes in direction, each site seems to have learned from this experience, and recent hires are demonstrably stronger leaders. And while we hope not to face more such turnover, we have learned to streamline the orientation process so that new directors now receive printed materials and an oral orientation to NJI, which help prepare them to hit the ground running.

There has also been turnover at the level of line staff, although that problem is endemic in small CBOs and has not yet caused significant disruptions. Given the need to anticipate staff turnover, NJI's use of locally contracted technical assistance providers (MDRC's site consultants) has brought some continuity and helped to retain knowledge and history as sites continued operations through periods of staff shortages and as new staff were orientated to the project.

Delivering Technical Assistance

While many of the challenges described above are specific to the kinds of goals and structures that characterize NJI, other challenges are more common to community-based projects and capacity-building endeavors. The challenges encountered in building NJI collaborations, developing coherent employment strategies, and designing service delivery mechanisms prompted MDRC to redesign the type and intensity of technical assistance (TA) provided to the sites. A brief review of site selection is necessary as a backdrop for understanding how TA has been adjusted to address the issues that sites' were facing.

The lead CBOs that were selected for NJI were chosen on the basis of institutional strengths and connections to their neighborhoods rather than on the basis of experience operating employment programs. Implicitly, by selecting organizations based on institutional capacities and connections to residents, the NJI team assumed that sites would need assistance to build their knowledge of workforce systems and increase their capacity to develop and implement a neighborhood-focused employment strategy on a significant scale.

The original plan was to provide sites with information on best practices for employment and training programs (work-first models, human capital approaches, and specifics related to recruitment, training, placement, case management, etc.)

and, more generally, for effective workforce systems (how they are structured, their decision-making authority, the availability of funding, etc.). The NJI technical assistance team had expected to sequence and schedule TA delivery at critical junctures so that sites would be provided with the information needed to make choices related to developing their neighborhood employment strategies and operating their pilot activities. After meeting with a range of organizations during the site selection process, and after early work with the selected sites, it became clear to the NJI partners that the participating CBOs had extremely limited experience in the employment domain and that the task of developing workforce service capacity was more formidable than anticipated.

As a result, rather than simply providing information on best practices, TA delivery evolved to include helping local partners to manage collaborations, to strengthen their capacities to participate in employment-related referral networks, to understand the dynamics of local labor markets, to improve their abilities to negotiate agreements with relevant public agencies, and, in some cases, to assist their basic organizational development. Sites also required support for a variety of issues that followed from the integration of a new program area into what were by-and-large social service organizations, particularly with respect to the necessary shift from a service-providing identity to one oriented to markets (employers) and customers (residents). The NJI team struggled with the sites over the type of staffing appropriate to manage a very complicated initiative like NJI. Eventually, a consistent set of CBO capacity issues emerged, which necessitated the development of an intensive and broad approach to technical assistance. The TA "package" was expanded to include direct or brokered assistance in three primary and overlapping areas:

- **Organizational development,** including assistance in two cases in which local partners required help developing governance structures and assistance in basic organization, project management, and budgeting. The goal of organizational development is to ensure that sites have a strong foundation for launching an employment initiative.
- **Project design,** including assistance with labor market analysis to assess labor demand and supply; policy analysis, including welfare reform policies and the policies and practices of local workforce boards; methods to understand the employment-related characteristics of residents; identification and assessment of the employment and training service delivery infrastructure and opportunities for partnerships; and best practices in the field of employment and training. TA in this area is geared toward providing information critical to the design of an effective employment strategy that can realize large-scale impacts.
- **Program operations,** including assistance with the implementation of the sites' emerging employment strategies. The NJI team is helping sites to structure and manage the collaborative of community partners and relations with employers, to develop appropriate case management and client tracking systems, to define job descriptions for new staff hires, and to incorporate elements of best practices into operating procedures. The aim is to strengthen sites' knowledge of effec-

tive employment strategies and practices and their capacity to manage and operate their programs effectively.

The variation in the types of organizations selected as lead CBO across sites has inevitably led to some inefficiencies in TA delivery. Because the lead CBOs approach their work differently, have different entry points for beginning their employment-focused activities, and have varying capacities, it hasn't been possible to deliver a uniform TA package. While it is possible to offer some information and training to all sites (either simultaneously or as needed), much of the TA to support pilot implementation has been tailored to each site's locale, circumstances, and stage of development. In one site, for example, the lead CBO had to establish a new collaborative of employment training agencies, social service providers, and public agency representatives; in response to this situation, TA was focused on improving the site's overall project management capacities and on strengthening quality control among the partnering service providers. Another site, by contrast, received assistance in developing client intake and case management operations. The implications of this tailoring of assistance has been the loss of economies of scale; MDRC has been unable to provide more standard TA across sites and so has been unable to spread TA costs across sites. Rather, assistance that is delivered one-on-one is relatively expensive and has added costs to the initiative's budget.

To help respond to local TA demands, MDRC hired local consultants — people who were already familiar with the selected cities and communities — as site representatives

Compared to the other TA we have received through other sources on other projects, the NJI TA has been user-friendly and very hands-on. By user-friendly, I mean that it has been focused to meet our unique needs, and the knowledge gained can be used indefinitely. In thinking about implementation, I anticipate that as we grow and issues emerge, we will continue to need the TA to help us improve and sustain our operations.

— Abby Gamboa, NNPC Executive Director

("site reps").[9] By working with these local TA providers, who are available to offer intensive support to the sites for up to 10 days per month, NJI management is better able to assist program development as needed, with quick response and consistent follow-through. In this manner, the site reps provide "traction" to the initiative while serving as ongoing coaches, helping each site to develop and operationalize employment strategies, to make midcourse corrections when plans do not go as intended, and to identify local sources of expertise as needed. In general, site reps are available to provide timely feedback as the programs develop.

The decision to hire site reps has also helped MDRC to ensure that the sites have access to good information about the local public policy context. Given that NJI is predicated on the building of relationships with a

9. In a few cases, it has been difficult to find locally based consultants who offer the right mix of experience and knowledge in the fields of organizational development and workforce development. In those sites, out-of-town consultants were hired instead.

broad range of local actors, MDRC places a premium on detailed knowledge of local politics, the structure of local and regional labor markets and workforce systems, and the general interests and styles of civic leadership and public bureaucracy. MDRC is well positioned to provide information about critical federal and state policies (such as TANF, WIA, or the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work grants); but it is difficult for MDRC to keep up with unfolding local policies, much less to offer guidance about local cultures or modes of engagement with the public sector. The site reps make it easier to offer an effective package of information and strategic advice about federal, state, and local policies and their relationship to NJI.

> *The complexity of the [employment] issue is huge. We do so many other things that it's a matter of focusing and prioritizing. There are resources out there to get a lot of information, a lot of detailed knowledge, but I'm concerned about flooding my staff. We need to keep it simple. What do you need to know to be most effective in delivering on the objectives?*
>
> *— Executive Director, HART*

Nonetheless, the TA that site reps and MDRC provide sometimes gets "lost" in the noise of activities conducted by overstretched local staff. A number of sites operate parallel initiatives simultaneously with NJI. While this sometimes increases the technical support available to the sites (two sites receive technical support from other national intermediaries that are not involved in NJI) — which presumably benefits their work on NJI — the complication is that TA is sometimes uncoordinated or contradictory. For instance, one intermediary might advise the site to focus strategically and concentrate on doing relatively few things well, while another might press to get a lot of activities up and running. While one might suggest a concerted effort to place neighborhood residents in the mainstream labor market, another might encourage local actors to initiate what can become labor-intensive efforts to create job-producing enterprises. Finally, each intermediary's technical support might create a set of follow-up tasks that has to be added to the long list already on the agency's agenda. The result is sometimes slower progress on NJI-related work — and a sense that NJI is competing for the attention of the lead CBO or its service provider partners, who are simultaneously involved in other, better-funded initiatives

The NJI partners developed two responses to such problems. First, to keep everyone on task, the team worked with the sites to develop benchmarks and timetables for the initiative. Benchmarks gave the sites a way to assess and track their progress over the year, and a way to focus their project-related activities, while giving MDRC and the founders the opportunity to make interim assessments of progress. The benchmarks also gave sites greater clarity about what was expected of them and how their progress would be assessed. Second, the site reps have also helped to maintain a task orientation, because their presence is a constant reminder of the need to make progress on the NJI activities. When progress slows or activities stall, the site reps are nearby to help get things back on track. Together, the benchmarks and the presence of the site reps have helped maintain the focus on NJI's

goals; one site rep commented that his presence and the benchmarks have instilled a valuable "NJI discipline" to guide both planning and implementation.

> *I feel like [our site rep] works for both MDRC and us. She makes sure that we keep on point so that we're compliant for MDRC, but she doesn't say, "You need to do this, this, this for MDRC" — she keeps in mind what we need to focus on.*
>
> *— NJI Project Director, DCCH*

The site reps have answered the need for readily available local technical expertise, but the trade-offs have been less direct exposure and on-the-ground experience for MDRC staff and the complication of managing and coordinating expertise in remote locations. To compensate, MDRC has developed mechanisms to capture some of the richness of experience at the sites and to address the coordination of TA, including monthly reports by site reps that document progress and obstacles at each site. Using these reports, the entire NJI team (the site reps, MDRC, and Urban Institute staff) meets to discuss crosscutting issues and administrative procedures. Approximately every six weeks, moreover, each site rep, on a rotating basis, leads a strategy session to discuss relevant issues at his or her site and to obtain guidance and suggestions from the team. In addition, MDRC is documenting the range of TA provided by site reps, MDRC staff, and others, seeking to identify the kind of technical expertise that is needed to support a neighborhood jobs initiative. Finally, the NJI project manager (an MDRC staff member) makes quarterly visits to each site and conducts periodic "check-in" telephone meetings with each site rep and local project director. Collectively, these efforts provide an up-to-date picture of progress in each site.

FACING THE CHALLENGE

Looking Ahead

Over the next few years, NJI will mature from a fledgling idea into a dynamic (albeit small) place-based, employment-focused initiative with lessons to offer the workforce development and community-building fields. We anticipate that during this period the sites will help place and sustain hundreds of local residents in jobs, using innovative programs that build on the community itself as a resource for change. This period will reveal whether the sites — with our help — can successfully partner with the key public agencies involved in workforce issues. MDRC's research program will help to capture this process, to understand what worked and what didn't, and to communicate useful information to the field for the next generation of work focused on improving the well-being of people living in poverty in the United States.

Despite their important local differences, the four ongoing NJI sites will face similar issues as they roll out programs and components specified in their strategic plans. Among the issues the sites are likely to wrestle with over the next year or two are problems with outreach and with reaching harder-to-serve residents, sustaining people in employment and building career ladders, linking to public systems, maintaining effective collaborations, establishing management information systems across partnerships, and, quite possibly, adjusting their approaches in a contracting job market. MDRC plans to hold regular cross-site convenings (with appropriate-level staff and, when it makes sense, the site reps) both to provide information on these issues in an efficient manner and to foster a sense of productive collaboration across the sites so that they can share information, lessons, and ideas.

To increase the effectiveness of the NJI approach, MDRC is currently exploring the development of other components that may augment the initiative. The next year will focus increased attention on building informal neighborhood networks as a means of fostering communities that better support residents' job search and placement activities. With respect to this latter, we are beginning research to identify key neighborhood networks and explore the possibility of building on existing social patterns to develop more effective community systems to disseminate employer-related information, to provide logistical supports for work, and, generally, to reinforce a range of work-positive messages. Our research on existing networks and differences among neighborhood residents on their effective use of connections will form the basis of activities to help individuals learn to draw on others more effectively and to expand their access both inside and outside the neighborhood.

We are also sharpening and refining our definition of what "NJI," as an initiative, is. To be effective, NJI needs to reach and assist diverse subpopulations in the target neighborhoods, which will require tailored approaches. Therefore, unlike other interventions that provide fairly straightforward "treatment" to individuals with similar characteristics, NJI is complicated by its tailoring of programs and services across a broad

spectrum of work-related needs and by its provision of these resources to a large segment of a community's population. With models that are more difficult to delineate — and approaches that are distinct, diffuse, and less controllable when delivered in fluid community contexts — it is critical to define the intervention in terms of quantities, qualities, and the general "recommended dose." Even if sites are successful in making progress toward their high employment goals, unless attention is focused on delivering a quantifiable program, we won't be able to determine whether NJI was strong enough, intense enough, or well enough targeted to account for whatever outcomes are produced.

In response to this concern, MDRC is engaged in several efforts. First, we're working with leaders of each site to define and exactly specify the nature of the intervention and how its delivery is adjusted for the scale of effort within a community context. Second, we want to ensure that the intervention is distinctive and includes more dimensions than simply the large-scale provision of services — with particular emphasis on developing community support for work and on ensuring that sites link residents to existing work incentives. Besides efforts to develop these additional dimensions, the goal is to provide them with sufficient intensity and spread that they reach most of the target group. Simultaneously, we are developing a structured program of implementation research to track and understand the relationship between what job-seekers receive from NJI and the nature of the outcomes produced.

The Benefits of an Employment Focus

During this early phase, perhaps the most distinctive and promising aspect of NJI is its concentration on employment as the catalyst for neighborhood transformation. In each site, NJI emphasizes the importance of focusing on the goal of increasing employment as a way to clarify priorities and determine which organizations to partner with, which services to provide, and how to conduct outreach to key groups of residents.

Poor urban neighborhoods face a wide variety of problems. The organizations that serve them are often tempted to get involved in many different efforts addressing various issues. While understandable, this can dissipate energies and resources and, ultimately, can weaken the effects on the very issues the organizations are working so hard to resolve. NJI identifies employment as the first priority — the issue that warrants early and intensive investment because employment is the potential driving force behind community transformation. Thus, NJI should not focus on housing issues, unless they are obstacles to employment; and it should not focus on social services, unless they are needed to smooth the path to work. Without discouraging organizations from addressing the issues that concern them, we view such efforts as beyond the scope of NJI. By repeatedly and consistently reinforcing the message of employment's centrality to community transformation, we have been able to help keep NJI site partners focused on their local strategic goals.

This has not, however, been easy. As mentioned above, at the start of the initiative a site's goals and strategies were largely self-defined, but it quickly became clear that sites needed more structure and guidance to generate workable plans. Our early attempts to specify numerical goals for increasing employment rates — the employment saturation targets — helped to galvanize action at the sites. The scale of effort implied by these targets helped local NJI directors to realize that achieving such goals would require the coordination of activities among various organizations and would necessitate a program that involved the community in the cultural and logistical support of work. When sites developed their strategic plans, the saturation targets provided an orientation for the comprehensive intervention design. Soon thereafter, however, several sites began to see the employment placement goals as ends in themselves, neglecting the broader framework of NJI (and the more difficult goal of employment retention). Without undercutting our emphasis on increasing employment, we then needed to remind the sites that NJI is more than a job program — that its goal is community transformation through increased employment of neighborhood residents.

This balancing act is complicated by the structure of the initiative — in particular, the involvement of a variety of partners. Different partners pull the project in different directions. In some sites (particularly in Chicago, for example), service provider partners are accustomed to treating individuals holistically, and they may find it difficult to focus on employment as the orienting goal. In other sites, even community-focused partners define the neighborhood much more broadly than NJI does, and so they are less committed to efforts that target residents of the official NJI area. To counter such tendencies, it is useful to repeatedly reinvigorate and refocus the initiative's vision through convenings and discussions of the larger goals.

In addition, although some CBOs joined NJI because they understood and were excited by the initiative's goals and the opportunity to join a national project, others joined primarily because they saw NJI as a funding source for their own programs and plans. This difference has had implications for how fully the sites incorporate the ideas underlying NJI; and since NJI's financial resources are relatively small, they provide little leverage even among CBOs that are motivated by the funding. Moreover, within the sites, some partners joined the collaborative because they are committed to the vision of NJI, while others are hoping to benefit from increased resources. To convey the potential strength of the NJI concept, it helps to have a strategic thinker on-site, either as the NJI director or as the site rep (or, preferably, both). Without such strategic leadership, particularly in sites where NJI participation is driven more by resource considerations than by conviction, the project has a tendency to degenerate to a simple employment program, or even to a collection of activities without a clear focus on either neighborhood *or* employment.

Finally, even when the focus is maintained on neighborhood employment, NJI is a complicated initiative. And although the operational benefits of a strategic focus on employment can be identified, it is not yet clear what effects the NJI interventions at the four ongoing sites will have or precisely

how the employment focus will contribute to these effects. Such matters await clarification through the sites' implementation experiences.

The Neighborhood Jobs Initiative is more than just another employment program. It seeks to explore whether the negative dynamics of isolation and poverty in a community can be turned around to generate a healthy system and culture of employment. The observations in this report focus on the challenges of NJI's planning phase — a sensitive period in any large-scale, complex initiative. Subsequent reports will detail the sites' experiences in implementing NJI strategies.

APPENDIX

The NJI Sites

- **Washington, DC: Development Corporation of Columbia Heights (DCCH), est. 1984. A community development corporation (CDC) with housing and real estate development experience.**

Early on, DCCH elected to pursue NJI within a collaborative framework, but it faced the challenge of establishing a collaboration from scratch. Within a few months of their selection, DCCH had convened a group of CBOs in the Columbia Heights neighborhood to discuss NJI and to secure their commitment and participation in an NJI collaborative. Despite the optimistic initial meetings, however, DCCH's expectations for the quick evolution of a governance structure were disappointed, and it proved harder than expected to build momentum and execute the planning tasks associated with NJI. In response, DCCH refocused its collaborative-building efforts on a few key CBOs, centered on a specific project: the development of a job club in Columbia Heights. With funding from a local foundation, DCCH worked with its collaborative members to design the activities and curriculum for the job club, which began in August 2000. The aim was to avoid duplication of effort by filling in the gaps in service delivery; collaborative members were enthusiastic about the additional services that the job club provided, which were lacking in the neighborhood. DCCH and its partners also plan to target jobs created by a large-scale commercial project slated to be developed next to the newly opened 14th Street metro station in Columbia Heights. Over time, DCCH's role has become more like that of a local employment intermediary — coordinating, focusing, and orchestrating essential employment-related services of local providers. In addition, the arrival of the metro station in Columbia Heights has set off significant gentrification pressures in the neighborhood, which makes this an interesting site in which to examine the issues of residential mobility and neighborhood transformation.

- **Hartford, CT: Hartford Areas Rally Together (HART), est. 1975. A community advocacy organization.**

When it joined NJI, HART was already operating an employment center in the Frog Hollow neighborhood. HART was also already part of a local collaborative, PROGRESS (Program for Economic Self-Sufficiency), a community coalition of four established community employment and training organizations; and it was working in cooperation with SINA (Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance), a membership organization of private nonprofit institutions that are also the largest employers in the neighborhood. Together, SINA and PROGRESS have formed a collaborative known as the Good Neighbor Partnership, whose mission is to help increase employment among neighborhood residents through assessment, job-readiness training, and first-source hiring of residents by the SINA member institutions.

Under the auspices of NJI, HART and its PROGRESS partners have applied for and obtained a $707,000 State of Connecticut Welfare-to-Work contract to

prepare and place 145 TANF recipients in employment. PROGRESS also was largely responsible for winning a $28 million Youth Opportunity Grant from the Department of Labor, which it shares with the Workforce Development Board.

In its capacity as a PROGRESS member, HART has played an active role in building support for NJI in policy circles; as one of two CBO representatives, PROGRESS was asked to participate on the State of Connecticut's Workforce Investment Act planning committee. HART has also forged a partnership with a number of local building and trade unions (including the bricklayers, painters, tapers, and ironworkers unions), which resulted in the establishment of pre-apprenticeship training programs for Frog Hollow and City of Hartford residents.

Early in NJI's pilot activities, in 1998, HART's job center provided employment services to more than 1,200 neighborhood residents and succeeded in placing 308 in jobs; approximately 60 percent of those who found employment were residents of Frog Hollow. Similarly, in 1999, HART assisted over 1,900 residents in their job search activities and helped place 292 of them in jobs.

- **Fort Worth, TX: Near Northside Partners Council (NNPC), est. 1991. A community service intermediary.**

NNPC is a CBO that acts as an advocacy and community organizing council, focusing on such issues as improving city services, reducing crime, increasing citizen participation, rehabilitating neighborhood housing, supporting economic development, and providing leadership development services to residents. The Near Northside has problems of both unemployment and significant underemployment, and NNPC's employment strategy will focus on both these issues.

During NJI's planning and pilot phase, NNPC had conversations with area employers, the local workforce board, and nonprofit service providers to discuss their potential roles in the initiative. Building on social ties and existing employment networks, NNPC's close-knit community (more than half the board members are neighborhood residents, and neighbors actively volunteer for a variety of local activities) is likely to provide an interesting foundation for a community support for work model. One of the distinctive issues for NJI in the Near Northside is the need to develop strategies that move individuals who have low-wage jobs into better jobs.

NNPC's relationships with local institutions and its ties to local residents have already resulted in large-scale efforts to help residents upgrade their education and skills. As a broker of relationships, NNPC was successful in convincing the community college to lend its English as a Second Language (ESL) curricula to the independent school district, and it assured the school district that neighborhood residents would attend if classes were offered. In the spring of 2000, the school district began teaching ESL and General Educational Development (GED) classes; by early April more than 280 residents were participating in ESL classes, and another 25 were preparing for a GED certificate — and there were 500 residents on the waiting list for the next class sessions. The community's response to computer training classes has been similar. Entertech (a multimedia soft-skills training program that was developed at the University of Texas-Austin) has been launched as a pilot, and thus far the

six-week classes have been fully enrolled; again, there is a waiting list for entry in future class sessions.

- **Chicago, IL: Project JOBS (Joint Opportunities Bring Success), est. 1996. An employment-focused collaborative of community-based service organizations in Chicago's Uptown/Edgewater neighborhood.**

As a local workforce intermediary, Project JOBS does not operate as a direct provider of services. Rather, it works to enhance the neighborhood's existing service delivery system. Project JOBS is a collaborative among nine principal organizations (and more than 20 other participating organizations) in the Uptown/Edgewater neighborhood of Chicago. Although Project JOBS is relatively young, the collaborative comprises organizations with experience in housing, social services, community organizing, youth programs, education, vocational training, and employment placement. The goal of Project JOBS is to develop an integrated and comprehensive community-based service delivery system to give neighborhood residents the employment-related assistance needed to obtain and sustain jobs. Prior to joining NJI, members of Project JOBS had negotiated an agreement with neighborhood hospitals to hire residents who are trained for Certified Nursing Assistant positions. The group had also succeeded in getting the Illinois Department of Human Services to support its community service model. The vision of Project JOBS is to build a supportive community where residents have access to a broad range of services to help them achieve economic self-sufficiency. Project JOBS focuses on the Uptown/Edgewater neighborhood of Chicago, an area that is experiencing significant gentrification pressures and that also has a high concentration of transient residents: individuals in homeless shelters and programs as well as immigrants.

Most of the Project JOBS member organizations serve a much broader neighborhood than the area defined as the NJI target community; for the purposes of NJI, Project JOBS has chosen to concentrate its employment efforts within the smaller, designated area. On an annual basis, member agencies place in jobs more than 800 residents from the larger service delivery area, and the goal in the coming years is to ensure that a significant number of new employees reside in the NJI target community. To address this issue, Project JOBS has chosen to contract with a service provider agency to deliver targeted outreach and job placement assistance to residents of the NJI neighborhood. Additionally, serving as an intermediary, Project JOBS has established a job-listing system that allows partner agencies to view current job openings, has developed a customer service training program, and has convened employer breakfasts and job fairs for its member agencies.

- **New York, NY: Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families, est. 1970. A youth-focused community services organization.**

Employment is only one element of Rheedlen's comprehensive strategic plan for the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ). Rheedlen's focus on the HCZ and its strategic door-to-door, block-by-block community organizing strategy provide an unusual test of targeting services to a clearly defined geographical area. For NJI, Rheedlen has

focused on developing in-house capacity in the employment and workforce development field. In March 1999, Rheedlen opened its Employment and Technology Center, where residents of HCZ can obtain assistance with job preparation and placement as well as computer training classes.

Rheedlen has also been working to develop connections with local public and private sector employers to generate employment opportunities for program participants. An early example is its partnership with the Morningside Area Alliance, a consortia of 19 private employers including Columbia University, Barnard College, Jewish Theological Center, International House, and Columbia University's Medical Campus/Health Center; this partnership may result in providing HCZ residents access to living-wage jobs, many with benefits, located near their neighborhood. The Morningside Area Alliance also provides Rheedlen and seven other CBOs with the job postings of its members.

In another arrangement, Rheedlen has negotiated with the City of New York's Human Resources Administration to allow TANF recipients who reside in the HCZ to count their classes at the Employment and Technology Center toward meeting their work participation requirements.

After consultations among Rheedlen, MDRC, and the NJI founders, in late 1999 it was mutually agreed that Rheedlen's plans for the Harlem Children's Zone go beyond a focus on employment and, therefore, that Rheedlen would not participate in the implementation phase of the national initiative.

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RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON MDRC PROJECTS

NOTE: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (**www.mdrc.org**), which also contains copies of MDRC's publications.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multi-site effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

A Research Framework for Evaluating Jobs-Plus, a Saturation and Place-Based Employment Initiative for Public Housing Residents. 1998. James Riccio.

Mobilizing Public Housing Communities for Work: Origins and Early Accomplishments of the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. James Riccio.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Jobs-Plus Site-by-Site: An Early Look at Program Implementation. 2000. Edited by Susan Philipson Bloom with Susan Blank.

Section 3 Public Housing Study

An examination of the effectiveness of Section 3 of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act in affording employment opportunities for public housing residents.

Lessons from the Field on the Implementation of Section 3 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). 1996. Maxine Bailey, Suzanne Lynn.

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Tulsa's IndEx Program: A Business-Led Initiative for Welfare Reform and Economic Development. 1997. Maria Buck.

Washington Works: Sustaining a Vision of Welfare Reform Based on Personal Change, Work Preparation, and Employer Involvement. 1998. Susan Gooden.

Cost Analysis Step by Step: A How-to Guide for Planners and Providers of Welfare-to-Work and Other Employment and Training Programs. 1998. David Greenberg, Ute Appenzeller.

Designing and Administering a Wage-Paying Community Service Employment Program Under TANF: Some Considerations and Choices. 1999. Kay Sherwood.

San Francisco Works: Toward an Employer-Led Approach to Welfare Reform and Workforce Development. 2000. Steven Bliss.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Implementing the Earnings Supplement Project: A Test of a Re-employment Incentive (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). 1997. Howard Bloom, Barbara Fink, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Wendy Bancroft, Doug Tattrie.

Testing a Re-employment Incentive for Displaced Workers: The Earnings Supplement Project. 1999. Howard Bloom, Saul Schwartz, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Suk-Won Lee.

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

Next Generation Project

A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Employment and Income: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform. 1998. Amy Brown, Maria Buck, Erik Skinner.

Learnfare: How to Implement a Mandatory Stay-in-School Program for Teenage Parents on Welfare. 1998. David Long, Johannes Bos.

Promoting Participation: How to Increase Involvement in Welfare-to-Work Activities. 1999. Gayle Hamilton, Susan Scrivener.

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Steady Work and Better Jobs: How to Help Low-Income Parents Sustain Employment and Advance in the Workforce. 2000. Julie Strawn, Karin Martinson.

Beyond Work First: How to Help Hard-to-Employ Individuals Get Jobs and Succeed in the Workforce. 2001. Amy Brown.

Project on Devolution and Urban Change

A multi-year study in four major urban counties — Cuyahoga County, Ohio (which includes the city of Cleveland), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia — that examines how welfare reforms are being implemented and affect poor people, their neighborhoods, and the institutions that serve them.

Big Cities and Welfare Reform: Early Implementation and Ethnographic Findings from the Project on Devolution and Urban Change. 1999. Janet Quint, Kathryn Edin, Maria Buck, Barbara Fink, Yolanda Padilla, Olis Simmons-Hewitt, Mary Valmont.

Food Security and Hunger in Poor, Mother-Headed Families in Four U.S. Cities. 2000. Denise Polit, Andrew London, John Martinez.

Assessing the Impact of Welfare Reform on Urban Communities: The Urban Change Project and Methodological Considerations. 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Johannes Bos, Robert Lalonde, Nandita Verma.

Post-TANF Food Stamp and Medicaid Benefits: Factors That Aid or Impede Their Receipt. 2001. Janet Quint, Rebecca Widom.

Social Service Organizations and Welfare Reform. 2001. Barbara Fink, Rebecca Widom.

Time Limits

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: An Early Implementation Report on Florida's Time-Limited Welfare Initiative. 1995. Dan Bloom.

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The Family Transition Program: Final Report on Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 2000. Dan Bloom, James Kemple, Pamela Morris, Susan Scrivener, Nandita Verma, Richard Hendra.

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Implementing Time-Limited Welfare: Early Experiences in Three States. 1995. Dan Bloom, David Butler.

The View from the Field: As Time Limits Approach, Welfare Recipients and Staff Talk About Their Attitudes and Expectations. 1997. Amy Brown, Dan Bloom, David Butler.

Welfare Time Limits: An Interim Report Card. 1999. Dan Bloom.

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

An evaluation of Connecticut's statewide time-limited welfare program, which includes financial work incentives and requirements to participate in employment-related services aimed at rapid job placement. This study provides some of the earliest information on the effects of time limits in major urban areas.

Early Data on the Implementation of Connecticut's Jobs First Program. 1997. Dan Bloom, Mary Andes.

Jobs First: Early Implementation of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Andes, Claudia Nicholson.

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Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project

An evaluation of Vermont's statewide welfare reform program, which includes a work requirement after a certain period of welfare receipt, and financial work incentives.

WRP: Implementation and Early Impacts of Vermont's Welfare Restructuring Project. 1998. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos, Johanna Walter, Patricia Auspos.

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Financial Incentives

Encouraging Work, Reducing Poverty: The Impact of Work Incentive Programs. 2000. Gordon Berlin.

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

MFIP: An Early Report on Minnesota's Approach to Welfare Reform. 1995. Virginia Knox, Amy Brown, Winston Lin.

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The New Hope Offer: Participants in the New Hope Demonstration Discuss Work, Family, and Self-Sufficiency. 1996. Dudley Benoit.

Creating New Hope: Implementation of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1997. Thomas Brock, Fred Doolittle, Veronica Fellerath, Michael Wiseman.

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New Hope for People with Low Incomes: Two-Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1999. Johannes Bos, Aletha Huston, Robert Granger, Greg Duncan, Thomas Brock, Vonnie McLoyd.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients.

Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

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The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects on Children of a Program That Increased Parental Employment and Income (SRDC). 2000. Pamela Morris, Charles Michalopoulos.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with support from the U.S. Department of Education, this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Adult Education for People on AFDC: A Synthesis of Research (U.S. Department of Education [ED]/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]). 1995. Edward Pauly.

Early Findings on Program Impacts in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1995. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander.

Five Years After: The Long-Term Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs (Russell Sage Foundation). 1995. Daniel Friedlander, Gary Burtless.

Monthly Participation Rates in Three Sites and Factors Affecting Participation Levels in Welfare-to-Work Programs (HHS/ED). 1995. Gayle Hamilton.

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Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Evaluating Alternative Welfare-to-Work Approaches: Two-Year Impacts for Eleven Programs (HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander, Gayle Hamilton, JoAnn Rock, Marisa Mitchell, Jodi Nudelman, Amanda Schweder, Laura Storto.

Impacts on Young Children and Their Families Two Years After Enrollment: Findings from the Child Outcomes Study (HHS/ED). 2000. Sharon McGroder, Martha Zaslow, Kristin Moore, Suzanne LeMenestrel.

What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup (HHS/ED). 2000. Charles Michalopoulos, Christine Schwartz.

Four Year Impacts of Ten Programs on Employment stability and Earnings Growth. (HHS/ED). 2000. Stephen Freedman. Available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and on www.mdrc.org.

The Experiences of Welfare Recipients Who Find Jobs (HHS/ED). 2000. Karin Martinson. Available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and on www.mdrc.org.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Preliminary Findings on Participation Patterns and First-Year Impacts. 1998. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: First-Year Findings on Participation Patterns and Impacts. 1999. Stephen Freedman, Marisa Mitchell, David Navarro.

The Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation: Final Report on a Work First Program in a Major Urban Center. 2000. Stephen Freedman, Jean Knab, Lisa Gennetian, David Navarro.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Low-Income Parents and the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. 1996. Earl Johnson, Fred Doolittle.

Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Suzanne Lynn.

Building Opportunities, Enforcing Obligations: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Sharon Rowser.

Fathers' Fair Share: Helping Poor Men Manage Child Support and Fatherhood (Russell Sage Foundation). 1999. Earl Johnson, Ann Levine, Fred Doolittle.

Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cindy Redcross.

Working and Earning: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Low-Income Fathers' Employment. 2000. John M. Martinez, Cynthia Miller.

The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum. 2000. Eileen Hayes, with Kay Sherwood.

Other

Can They All Work? A Study of the Employment Potential of Welfare Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1995. James Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program. 1995. James Kemple, Daniel Friedlander, Veronica Fellerath.

From Welfare to Work Among Lone Parents in Britain: Lessons for America. 1996. James Riccio.

Education Reform

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Early Implementation Lessons from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1996. James Kemple, JoAnn Leah Rock.

Career Academies: Communities of Support for Students and Teachers — Emerging Findings from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1997. James Kemple.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School. 2000. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred C. Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

LILAA Initiative

This study of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative explores the efforts of five adult literacy programs in public libraries to improve learner persistence.

So I Made Up My Mind: Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. 2000. John T. Comings, Sondra Cuban.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs. 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and San Francisco.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods such as large-scale studies to determine a program's effects, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.

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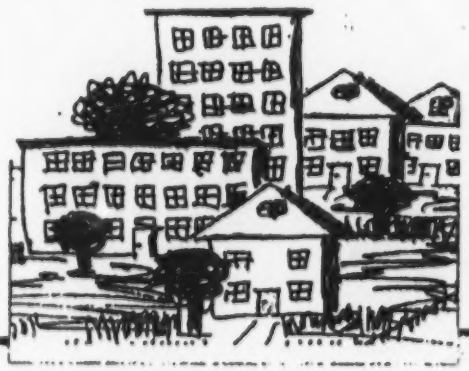

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